United Nations E/2010/NGO/30

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
3 May 2010

Original: English

Substantive session of 2010
New York, 28 June-22 July 2010
Item 2 (c) of the provisional agenda*
Annual ministerial review: implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to gender equality and empowerment of women

Statement submitted by Israel Women's Network, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/2010/100.

10-34245 (E) 110610

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Statement

Women of Valour programme

Equipping disadvantaged women with the skills, knowledge and self-confidence to gain rewarding employment is crucial to achieving gender equality. Especially important in a time of global financial crisis, promoting women's involvement in the workforce can serve to relieve women and their families of the stifling conditions of poverty and economic dependence.

The Israel Women's Network is determined to improve the status of women in Israel regardless of their religious outlook, political affiliation or ethnic origin. In Israel, poverty is on the rise and women's reports of poverty are consistently high according to various indices. For instance, in 2007, 23 per cent of Israeli women reported that they reduce food purchasing due to poverty, compared with 18 per cent of men (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2009). Striving to assist women in breaking free from the cycle of poverty and unemployment, the Israel Women's Network operates its Women of Valour programme. For more than five years, the project has successfully empowered unemployed women of various backgrounds with the tools to thrive in the workforce and in all realms of life.

Women of Valour reaches out to women aged 30 to 50 from low-income families all over Israel. The programme extends to both Israeli-born and immigrant women, focusing on the vulnerable Arab, Ethiopian, Bukhari and Caucasian (former Soviet Union countries) populations. These women have been unemployed for a long period or have never worked. They tend to lack education or work skills and come from traditional backgrounds that promote early marriage and are expected to stay at home with children instead of earning a living.

Working with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services and local municipalities, the programme operates over 20 groups across the country. Led by professional facilitators, each group of women undertakes a three-year process. In the first year, workshops acquaint women with the employment market and its expectations. Drawing on their natural attributes, they are taught critical skills, such as writing curricula vitae and communications. At this stage, the programme seeks to enhance the women's feelings of self-worth. In the second year, the participants are assisted with job placement. An employment club serves as a source of professional and social support during the second and third years of the programme.

Over 1,000 women have participated in Women of Valour over the past five years, and successful entry into the workforce is estimated at 75 per cent. The Israel Women's Network is working hard to bring about positive social change in Israel and to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. We hope that our collaboration with local municipalities and federal ministries will lead to the expansion of Women of Valour so that every woman can have access to the rewarding employment and satisfying life conditions she deserves.